

For the community, by the community

23, Nov, 2011; a normal day. But as the day is progressing, the environment around Gram Panchayat Sidhpura is charging up. The level of enthusiasm in children is rising with a little bit of nervousness. The elders are talking about social issues and government schemes. Eyes of women are reflecting a new wavelength of hope. And why it should not? After all, it is the time when the endeavors of the community of Sidhpura are going to be appreciated as it was ‘Aatmarpan’ of their water tank constructed under Swajaldhara.

Sidhpura is a Gram Panchayat under block Haldaur of district Bijnore, U.P. It is a Gram Panchayat with around 500 families. These families have a well – off economic background and they are blessed with river Ganga. This signifies that people of Sidhpura have sufficient supply of drinking water. But the people of Sidhpura realized that they need enhanced level of water supply as far as drinking water is concerned. They reached to this conclusion after analyzing that any carelessness pertaining to drinking water may have severe repercussions. As they looking for a system that could fit their requirements, Abhinav came forward as a helping hand and acquainted the villagers of Swajaldhara. Their demands synchronized with objectives of Swajaldhara, and hence the Swajaldhara began to be implemented in Sidhpura.

Swajaldhara is a drinking water supply scheme that encourages community participation and is funded by Department of Drinking Water Supply, Ministry of Rural Development, GoI.

The background of Swajaldhara relates to reforms in rural drinking water supply sector adopted in 1999 in the country. The basis reforms included community participation in the planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of schemes of its choice. Pilot projects were launched and finally Swajaldhara scheme was launched.

As decided, the community started implementing Swajaldhara with Abhinav as implementing agency. Following training and workshops were conducted throughout the project:

1. Programme orientation of the community – A training programme was conducted for the whole community popularly known as “Aam Sabha” in which the specially recruited and trained community mobilize told about the Swajaldhara project, its principles, scope of work. All kinds of activities and trainings undertaken in this project were also detailed out by us.

2. Feasibility Study – This training is conducted by the engineers recruited under the project. The objective of the training is to make the community aware of different technical options available for the community. Since the project is based on capital cost sharing, hence it is vital that the community understands the implications of the selection of the schemes based on its viability and cost.

3. Hygiene and Environmental Awareness

Sanitation Awareness- The community organizer imparts the training on issues related to clean and potable water through healthy home survey and cleanup campaigns. Though, the component of construction of project is not addressed under the project, yet personal and environmental sanitation aspects have to be clearly discussed with the community.

4. Women's Empowerment Training- Women are the main stakeholders in this project. Under these training programmes, the rural women in the respective Gram Panchayat are brought together to understand the importance of sustaining the schemes through their personal efforts. The project does not envisage micro-financing, yet the idea of SHG formulation and self-financing is promoted under these training programmes.

5. Technical Trainings- The trained engineers recruited under the programme have the responsibility of imparting this training to the community. The emphasis of this training is towards the detailing of the outcome of technically feasible options. The community is told about the per capita cost in the pipeline distribution. The required thickness of the pipes, construction of the pump house, laying of distribution main etc.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

Trainings- At the initial phase of the project, we were interested with the reorganization of Village Water Committee, popularly known as Jal Prabandhan Samiti (JPS) in Uttar Pradesh. The elected chairman of JPS is the chairman of the organized Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) which comprises of equal number of members from JPS and water users. The task of imparting training to VWSC about the monitoring and evaluation procedures was done by State Water & Sanitation Mission (SWSM).

What makes story of Sidhpura is unique convergence model implemented by the community with the relentless support of Abhinav. After constructing tank, the community realized that constructing a water tank system requires security because the stairs are open to children and it could prove dangerous. After a public meeting organized by Abhinav, they reached the conclusion that they should build boundaries around the area with gate to enter the area. But there was no provision for constructing boundaries and constructing boundaries requires money. The answer to this problem was 13th State Finance. The community applied for assistance to construct boundaries.

The next component of convergence model came in the form of recharge pit and the story behind it is far more interesting. When releasing water from the tank, it was observed that a large amount of water gets waste. After reaching a common consensus, the community came up with a wonderful idea of constructing recharge pits. These pits will not only conserve water released from tanks but also improve the life of water tank. This initiative was funded by

Another feature of the convergence model was plantation in the vacant area. The vacant space around water tank was employed for plantation of beautiful flowers to develop a garden in the area. The land belonged to Gram Panchayat, so it was decided funds under PRI will be released for this applaudable initiative.

Sidhpura is an instance to emulate as it has presented an example of convergence of various bodies like State Authorities, the community, corporate sector and banks. It was quite reflecting on “Aatmarpan” of water tank. The philosophy of Abhinav of being the facilitator rather a implementer worked in right direction.

What more could indicate the splendid success of Swajaldhara with Abhinav in Sidhpura!